



Catholic Charities

Archdiocese of San Antonio, Inc.

Good Afternoon, and thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today on the impact of extreme temperatures on the elderly. My name is Steve Saldana and I am the President of Catholic Charities for San Antonio and South Texas. My archdiocese extends half way to Austin and all the way to the Mexican border.

In the San Antonio area there are approximately 250,000 seniors. 25% of which live in poverty and have needs that require some sort of additional help or intervention. Of these 62,000 seniors at least 25% are frail elderly living in their homes.

I returned to San Antonio in 1987 after living in the Midwest for thirteen years. During that time I read in horror of the number of elderly between St. Louis and New York, who died in the summer from the heat. The buildings in the north frequently do not have air conditioners and seniors through fear; lock

N. MAIN AVE.

- Children's Health Insurance Program
- Adolescent Pregnancy & Parenting Program
- Adoption
- Counseling
- Parents as Teachers

Senior Community Services

- Foster Grandparent Program
- Retired and Senior Volunteer Program
- Senior Employment Program

W. SALINAS ST.

- Ask-a-Lawyer
- Crisis Intervention
- Immigration
- Refugee Resettlement

LOCKHILL-SELMA RD.

- Catholic Counseling & Consultation Center

S. TRINITY ST.

- Guadalupe Home

themselves in their home because they are often alone and afraid.

When a senior died from the heat, here 6 years ago, I knew that something had to be done. My average client at the time made \$480 a month on social security and could not afford air conditioning. They frequently had to choose between buying their medications and food, and paying their utility bills, which increased during the summer months due to the increased cost of fuel. I have seen many seniors who, because they were afraid, locked themselves in their homes with windows nailed shut for safety.

With days frequently over 100 degrees and extremely high humidity, the potential for a senior to bake to death in their home was real. Only one third of Senior Housing in San Antonio is air-conditioned.

My agency partnered with the City of San Antonio, United Way, the Kronkosky Foundation and Channel Four News, a local television station, to

create *Fans For San Antonio*. That year we raised \$50,000 and distributed over 5000 fans. In the six years that we have been giving out fans, we have raised over quarter million dollars and have distributed over 25,000 fans.

As awareness of this program spread, I received requests from outlying areas all the way to Laredo asking for fans to help their elderly. Unfortunately our funding sources are area based and we could not distribute outside of Bexar County. What I am asking you to consider today is to provide funding especially for smaller communities to purchase fans. It may seem simplistic that a \$15 dollar fan can save a life, but not one elderly person has died in their home from the heat since we started *Fans For San Antonio*.

In the same vein, I distributed meals to seniors during an ice storm several years ago. What I saw

would sadden anyone. One elderly lady was alone in her home waiting for the meal driver to light her heater. The heater was in one room and the valve in another. The house was freezing and the woman was afraid to light the heater. She would surely have died without help that day.

Seniors frequently are in danger from antiquated heating units in older apartments. Two years ago an elderly couple burned to death trying to stay warm near their heater. Because of liability issues no agency will distribute heaters. What is needed is a voucher system that will allow a senior to purchase a good and safe heater and then get reimbursed for the purchase.

I am enclosing a copy of the heat relief plan developed by the Metropolitan Health district in partnership with *Fan For San Antonio*. It covers completely the impact of heat and humidity, and

outlines steps to prevent its affect such as frequent dehydration.

Thank you, for the opportunity to speak today.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'SS' or 'S.S.', written in a cursive style.

Steve Saldana

President, Catholic Charities Archdiocese of San Antonio